

PresbyNews OnLine

April 2009

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We now look forward this month to Palm Sunday, Holy Week, and Easter. Even in our secular culture, there are still a lot of people outside the church who will visit during this time of year. There may be people you see in the next two weeks that you won't normally see at church. Please be in prayer for our witness to these people, and please reach out to them with Christ's love, hospitality, and good news. We are here to introduce people to Jesus Christ, and to be a part of the extension of His Kingdom here on earth.



April Presbytery Meeting

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- The Lord's Work in Louisville, *a report by Clark Cowden*

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Photo by Bob Battenfield

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- William Lullo Pipe Organ Concert Sunday, May 3, at La Jolla PC
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It's a New Day

APRIL MEETING OF PRESBYTERY WILL BE ON SATURDAY, APRIL 18

For the first time in living memory, as the say, the Presbytery of San Diego will meet on a Saturday morning rather than a Tuesday afternoon or evening. The April 18 meeting at Chula Vista Presbyterian Church will commence at 9 a.m. and finish by 1 pm. Marc Pena, a Commissioned Lay Pastor at the Trinity Life new church plant in Chula Vista will be preaching. Commissioners, be sure to check on this website to download the docket and reports.

(Editor's Note: Following is a press release from Presbyterian News Service recapping remarks by EP Clark Cowden at the General Assembly Council Meeting in Louisville last month. Cowden, a council member, is nationally recognized for his views on the challenges facing our church, our nation and our world.)

COWDEN: LOOK FOR GOD'S NEW LIFE FORMS AMID TODAY'S CHOAS

by Bill Lancaster

Special to the Presbyterian News Service

LOUISVILLE - How can congregations and church governing bodies deal with sudden, dramatic, unexpected change when they are designed to handle only gradual change?

This is the question that the **Rev. Clark Cowden**, executive presbyter of the Presbytery of San Diego, put to the General Assembly Council (GAC) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) here March 26.

To illustrate sudden change, Cowden showed a clip from the movie "Sea Biscuit" depicting the dramatic change brought about by the 1929 stock market crash that precipitated a westward migration of many unemployed, homeless people looking for work.

He defined the concepts of continuous change versus discontinuous change. Continuous change is slow and expected, like the birth of a child or the transition to a new national administration.

Discontinuous change, by contrast, is fast and unexpected. In these situations, the present is very different than the immediate past, such as with an unexpected death or stock market drop. Cowden said simply "working harder and longer doesn't help" to manage discontinuous change - people must work differently.

"Our congregations were structured in a time of continuous change and they are prepared to deal with continuous change," he said, adding that we now find ourselves in a time of discontinuous change with the sub-prime mortgage crisis and stock market slide.

Cowden cited the Bible story of the Babylonian exile in Jeremiah 29 as another example of discontinuous change, and he read part of Psalm 137, written about the exile.

Phrases from that psalm include "By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down and there we wept as we remembered Zion" and "How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"

He also read part of the Jeremiah 29 passage that says to the Israelites in exile, "Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat what they produce, take wives and have sons and daughters ... But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare."

"Last thing they wanted to do was invest themselves in the welfare of that city. Yet that is what God told them to do, and not to listen to the false prophets," Cowden told the GAC.

In his talk, he also cited the book "Surfing the Edge of Chaos," which asserts that when faced with threat or opportunity, all living organisms are pushed to the edge of chaos. But it is there on the edge of chaos that new life forms begin to emerge.

"In Babylon, God created a new life form - the synagogue. Previously they thought God could only dwell in the temple," he said. "But as they tried to adapt to life in Babylon, they met in each others' homes, and out of those gatherings emerged the new life form of the synagogue. After they returned from exile, they kept the synagogues."

Cowden reminded the group that although discontinuous change is a challenge, it is also a chance for positive new ideas.

"We recognize that in many ways we have been pushed by threats and opportunities to the edge of chaos," he said. "But good news: God is creating new life forms among us. If we can see them and begin to identify with them, we can see what God is doing in our midst. We can learn how to deal with the discontinuous changes that have occurred among us."

Bill Lancaster is associate for new church development in Foothills Presbytery.

THE LORD'S WORK IN LOUISVILLE

-- A Report on the Denomination

By Clark Cowden, Executive Presbyter

Dear Friends of the Presbytery of San Diego,
This past week I attended the General Assembly Council (GAC) meeting in Louisville. The biggest item on the agenda was the reduction of the 2009 budget. This was the first time that the budget had been reduced on a strategic, prioritized basis, rather than just cutting the same percentages from all budget areas across the board. The annual GAC budget of \$110 million was reduced by almost \$4 million.

There have been 451 full-time GAC employees. Fifty-six positions were eliminated, and 12 new positions were added, for a net reduction of 44 positions (about 10%). Fourteen positions had been eliminated previously, and 28 vacant positions were eliminated, leaving 14 people who were informed on Friday that they were being laid off. Please keep these people in your prayers. This is never easy.

Nine positions were eliminated from Theology, Worship, and Education, and seven positions were eliminated from Compassion, Peace, and Justice. Three were eliminated from Evangelism and Church growth, one was eliminated in Racial Ethnic and Women's Ministries, one from Vocation, and one from World Mission. The only program that was completely eliminated was the National Health ministry office, partly because there is some health ministry lodged in another area.

In 2008, 313 people began the application process to serve Jesus Christ through our denomination in mission work. 114 people completed the application process and began serving. In the first three months of 2009, even in tough economic times, we have already sent out 10 new mission workers (some of these are part-time and some are volunteers). Please pray that more people will give to the mission work of our denomination. The Company of New Pastors program, which helps recent seminary graduates make the adjustment to congregational life with a mentor and a peer group, just received a \$1 million grant from Lilly to keep this going. We've also seen a 45% increase in the number of racial ethnic pastors who now have their Personal Information Forms (PIF) on line looking for a new call.

Of our 10,700 congregations, there are about 4,800 that do not have a permanent installed pastor. Of those 4,800, about 2,800 have some kind of regular, temporary, pastoral leadership – an interim, a designated pastor, or a temporary supply. 2,000 churches do not have any pastoral leadership whatsoever. Please pray for these churches.

The Vocation committee has developed a new residency program for recent seminary graduates. This would enable graduating students who have difficulty finding a first call, to get a two-year internship, serving a number of under-served churches in a particular area. As soon as funding is found, this program is ready to begin. About 131 of our 171 presbyteries use Commissioned Lay Pastors (CLP). Eight years ago we had 200 CLPs. Today we have about 700.

About half of our New Church Developments (NCDs) actually “make it.” Of the ones who do, the average NCD has about 75 people in worship after five years. Our **Trinity Life Fellowship** new church plant in the south bay (meeting at Chula Vista Pres under **Marc Peña**), has already surpassed this number after only six months!

Linda Valentine, the executive director of the GAC, has assembled a really good leadership team. The staff is made up of capable, committed Christians with a strong faith in Christ. The GAC is in the process of evolving into some new roles. What the national office of a denomination can and should do is changing. People are being pushed to be creative and innovative. It remains to be seen what direction this role will eventually take.

Flying back to San Diego, the GAC meeting made me appreciate even more how good we have it here in San Diego. I believe we have a lot more going for us than many other presbyteries do. We have talented leadership, people with skill and experience, people who are willing to learn, and people who are eager to discover the shape of future ministry. This is a blessing. Not every corner of our denomination is as fortunate as we are. I thank my God for all of you, every time I remember you.

Presbytery Asks for Monthly Contributions

The Presbytery of San Diego continues to work diligently to be good stewards of the mission money that you send to it. While the budget committee and Presbytery Council continue to evaluate our situation in light of the current economic difficulties, it appears many churches are in the habit of not giving during the first quarter of the year.

Executive Presbyter Clark Cowden said: “While we appreciate the financial stresses everyone is dealing with, this practice creates some cash flow difficulties for our presbytery level ministry. You can be a big help to us if your church would begin to send in your contributions once a month, rather than once a quarter or twice a year. If you have any questions about the finances of the presbytery, and what your money is going for, please do not hesitate to contact us.”

Around the Presbytery

One Great Hour of Sharing Money Returns to San Diego County

If your church is participating in the One Great Hour of Sharing offering during Lent, Executive Presbyter Clark Cowden encourages you to give to this offering.

“Over the past year and a half, the Presbytery of San Diego has been the gracious recipient of money from this offering, which has been used to help people who lost their homes during the fires of October 2007,” he states. “Money that you have given to this Presbyterian Church (USA) offering has come back here to our local area, to provide much needed assistance.”

Taylers to Travel to Zambia in May

Taking on a mission project themselves, over the past few years Gerry and Bill Tayler have successfully raised \$50,000 to build a school in Zambia. They are traveling there again in May to see how our Presbyterian mission work is expanding. Gerry is Vice-Moderator of the Presbytery, and Bill is chair of the Presbytery Missions Committee.

Zambia is a country that has been devastated by the spread of AIDS. Many children are born infected and many become orphans. The Taylers started an Extra Commitment Opportunity (ECO) through the General Assembly Council in Louisville, to raise money to build a school. In only about 15 months, they raised \$50,000, and the school is now built! We thank Gerry and Bill for this important ministry. Please pray, for there is still much to be done.

Around the PCUSA

Calvin at 500

LISTING OF ALL THINGS CALVIN

A great deal of information about John Calvin, a leading theologian of the Protestant Reformation, is available online during this, the 500th Anniversary of his birth.

Check the denomination's site
(www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/calvin.htm)

Go to www.pres-outlook.org for a list of Calvin conferences worldwide.

QuickTime™ and a
TIFF (Uncompressed) decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

Additional conferences can be found at The Meeter Center for Calvin Studies (www.calvin.edu/meeter/events/2009conferences.htm).

Also additional events, updates and online exhibits can be found at these locations:

Calvin '09 website (www.calvin09.org/EN/home/home.html)
Calvin 500 blog (calvin500blog.org)
Huguenots de France et d'ailleurs
(<http://huguenots.free.fr/Calvin/manifestations/paris/htm>)

There's also a ton of material on wikipedia. Go to:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Calvin

John Calvin 500!

By Joseph D. Small
Director, Theology, Worship and Education
PCUSA

Many Presbyterians greet the news that 2009 will mark the 500th anniversary of John Calvin's birth with a yawn, a roll of the eyes, or even a derisive snort. Why are we so dismissive of our forebear in the Reformed tradition?

Lutherans adore Martin Luther. Methodist hearts are strangely warmed by John Wesley. Anglicans even have a sardonic fondness for Henry VIII. But Presbyterians are uncertain about John Calvin and his legacy. Calvin is not a Reformed idol. John Calvin would have been pleased by our reluctance to revere him. He did not want to be idolized by future generations. In order to discourage veneration, he specified that he be buried in Geneva's common cemetery in an unmarked grave. Contemporary visitors to Geneva may stumble upon Rue Calvin, but his house no longer stands, and no one even knows where it was.

We need not put Calvin on a pedestal in order to appreciate the ways in which his perspectives on Christian faith and life have shaped Reformed churches throughout the world, and continue to shape our church today.

At the conclusion of his admiring biography of Calvin, Theodore Beza, his successor in Geneva, wrote, "Since it has pleased God that Calvin should continue to speak to us through his writings, which are so scholarly and full of godliness, it is up to future generations to go on listening to him ..." ¹ Future generations have continued to listen, not passively, but with a lively engagement that sometimes learns from Calvin, sometimes argues with him, and sometimes discovers that contemporary questions and answers are revised by their contact

with his questions and answers.

As the Calvin Jubilee approaches, we can recall some of the ways his thinking has shaped the life of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including our understanding of the importance of education for children, youth, and adults.

Calvin placed the highest value on education in the church. He thought, “doubly fools” those “who do not deign to learn, because they think they are wise enough.” ² Thus, Calvin established schools for Geneva’s children and youth, and he taught Scripture and theology daily. His understanding of Christian education was not confined to the classroom, however, or limited to the most talented students. Many poor ignorant people today, he wrote, “though ignorant and unskilled in the use of language, make known Christ more faithfully than all the theologians ... with their lofty speculations.” ³

Scripture was central to Calvin’s understanding of Christian education. We may mistakenly think of *Institutes of the Christian Religion* as a scholastic work of systematic theology, but Calvin saw as its purpose, “to prepare and instruct candidates in sacred theology for the reading of the divine Word, in order that they may be able both to have easy access to it and to advance in it without stumbling.” ⁴ Calvin’s teaching and writing shared a thorough, lively engagement with Scripture as God’s present, living word to the church.

John Calvin did not view the Bible as a collection of facts to be learned or propositions to be mastered. In one of his delightful images, he likens Scripture to a pair of eyeglasses: “Just as eyes, when dimmed with age or weakness or by some other defect, unless aided by spectacles, discern nothing distinctly; so such is our feebleness, unless Scripture guides us in seeking God, we are immediately confused.” ⁵ We study the Bible, not for its own sake, but because Scripture helps us to see God truthfully, ourselves honestly, and God’s Way in the world clearly.

God’s new Way in the world was central to Calvin’s teaching. He did not see matters of social and economic life as footnotes to the gospel or addenda to the nature of the church, but integral to knowledge and service of God who is Creator and Redeemer of all of life. He would have been puzzled by the contemporary distinction between compassion and justice. Any separation of theology and ethics would have been foreign to his comprehensive thinking about Christian faith and life.

Calvin’s central concerns with Scripture and God’s Way in all of life inform the educational materials of Congregational Ministries Publishing. We Believe, our central Presbyterian curriculum, is in the spirit of Calvin’s continuing reform of the church. That is one reason why our attention to Calvin’s Jubilee year is not an antiquarian endeavor or an exercise in hagiography. Instead, it is a chance to focus on the ways he continues to help in probing the depths of our faith and

faithfulness.

Notes

1. Theodore Beza, *The Life of John Calvin* (Durham, U.K.: Evangelical Press, 1997), p. 140.
2. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, 50:4 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993) p. 54.
3. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 1:45 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), p. 76.
4. Calvin: *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, "John Calvin to the Reader," 1559 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) p. 4.
5. Calvin: *Institutes*, 1.14.1, pp. 160–161.

GAC Trims 2009 Budget by \$4 Million; \$10 Million Cut was Feared

Meeting in Louisville two weeks ago, the General Assembly Council (GAC) of the Presbyterian Church (USA) approved a revised 2009 budget of \$106,914,584. The new budget reduces expenses by \$3.99 million. Additional revenue from prior year accumulations (unused funds from previous years) of \$5.93 million will cover the remainder of a projected \$9.92 million shortfall. In September, the GAC had approved a 2009 mission budget of \$110,885,317.

Presbyterian Foundation reports 2008 mission contribution of \$78 million

by Jerry L. Van Marter

Presbyterian News Service

JEFFERSONVILLE, IN - The Presbyterian Foundation reports that it made \$78 million available for Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) mission funding in 2008. Additionally in 2008, the foundation said it received new gifts and accounts amounted to \$29.1 million, including \$14.3 million in endowment funds.

"Despite the economic challenges facing foundations around the globe, these positive results are testament to the power of giving by Presbyterians with accumulated resources and a commitment to further the work of the Church now and in the future," the foundation said in a press release.

"Over the past five years, the generosity of faithful Presbyterians throughout the United States has enabled the Foundation to make available more than \$390 million for the mission and ministry of the church," the statement said.

One of the largest religious foundations in the U.S., the Foundation cultivates, attracts, and manages financial resources of individuals and institutions to benefit PC(USA) mission. Now more than 200 years old, the Presbyterian Foundation

and its subsidiary, New Covenant Trust Company, N.A., manages more than \$1.3 billion in charitable endowments, life income plans, trust and investment management accounts.

People

Upcoming Events

William Lullo Pipe Organ Concert Sunday, May 3, at La Jolla PC

The LJPC Concert Series is proud to present William J. Lullo performing a pipe organ concert at 7 p.m., Sunday May 3. Tanya Chen said: "This concert will commemorate Bill's fifteenth anniversary as organist at La Jolla Presbyterian Church. In 2002, Bill composed a Requiem Concerto which was performed by organ, orchestra and choir as a part of our series. This year he will share his musical genius with pieces by Bach, Franck, Liszt, Lemare, Elmore, Handel, Schumann, Mendelssohn and Mulet."

Tickets are not required for this concert. A suggested donation of \$10 per person will be received at the door. The doors will open at 6 pm. The church is located at 7715 Draper Ave. across from the La Jolla Recreation Center. There is free parking in the underground garage, which is accessed from Kline Street. Child care is available. A reception will follow in Fellowship Hall.

PresbyNews OnLine

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